

SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Date: 1 February 2016

Subject: New SBL Membership Rate Model

Dear Member,

We are very pleased to announce a new membership rate model that the SBL Council believes will foster biblical scholarship and promote community that cares for our collective future. After a year-long study and reflection on a wide range of member needs, the Council approved this model in fall 2015.

The new rate structure will provide more thoroughgoing fairness based on ability to pay and maintain rates comparatively low for a learned society member at every income level.

Beginning 1 February 2016, the new rates are the following:

Total Personal Annual Income	Membership Type		
	Student	Full	Public
\$0 - \$9,999	\$10	\$15	\$10
\$10,000 - \$24,999	\$35	\$45	\$30
\$25,000 - \$49,999		\$75	\$50
\$50,000 - \$74,999		\$115	\$77
\$75,000 - \$99,999		\$155	\$103
\$100,000 and over		\$210	\$140

The previous membership rates were \$60 for Student, \$105 for Full, and \$55 for Public.

SBL has historically kept rates low, and SBL's membership dues have been well below the rates of peer societies. However, even with this commitment, SBL has had a flat fee, while many learned societies—and most of our closest peers—have income-based membership rates. In addition to continuing to maintain comparatively low rates, SBL will adopt an income-based membership fee, and the following provides the rationale for this decision.

A flat membership rate structure is a regressive fee. Members who earn less per year effectively pay more of their income for the same member benefits relative to members who earn more. This is especially true with membership dues that have flat rates for a broad category (such as full member), since the income distribution can be quite wide. Yet, members at the lower distribution arguably need member benefits to a greater extent because they are forging their careers, often have less or no institutional funding, or are otherwise unable to afford or access scholarly resources. It is hardest on those

scholars at the earliest stages of their careers, independent scholars, many in the international community, and contingent faculty—an ever-increasing part of the higher education workforce.

SBL is a community of the past, present, and future. In order to foster biblical scholarship, we have to support today the guild of tomorrow. Many established scholars have succeeded in a generation that had a better economic outlook in biblical studies and higher education. In the *New York Times* article, "[The Last Professor](#)," Stanley Fish reviewed the dire condition of the humanities in higher education and ended with this, "People sometimes believe that they were born too late or too early. . . . I feel that I have timed it just right, for it seems that I have had a career that would not have been available to me had I entered the world 50 years later. Just lucky, I guess." Luck will have less to do with this when a guild's members support the colleagues who follow them.

Applying an income-based membership fee looks to the future and supports accessibility across the globe and for all scholars, whatever stage of their career. We began the financial modeling with these three member profiles in mind: graduate students, under-employed members, and under-resourced members, including those in countries in the International Cooperation Initiative. Scholars with more resources will help provide access for many of the most marginalized and threatened members of the guild. We are intellectually impoverished without the contribution of scholars and the diversity of methods from all quarters of the world.

With your membership, you can support this new model, which supports all of our members and the resources that make membership valuable. As SBL continues to maintain and produce new resources indispensable to members' scholarly needs, we will remain committed to a membership model that ensures broad accessibility to all resources. That is the raison d'être of an academic, membership organization.

It is Council's hope and intention that this change helps usher in new accessibility and diversity for membership in the Society of Biblical Literature, while providing resources that foster the future of biblical scholarship. For this important step to be successful, it requires individuals in community supporting each other.

Sincerely,
John F. Kutsko
Executive Director